

Mississippi River Facts Overhead #1

The Mississippi River flows over 2,350 miles, from Lake Itasca, Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico.

The river begins as a small clear stream.

The Mississippi River serves as the border between 10 states.

The Mississippi River watershed includes 1.2 million square miles and includes tributary rivers from 33 states and 2 Canadian provinces.

The river is the country's main inland waterway.

The widest part of the river is three and a half miles just north of Clinton, Iowa.

The depth of the river ranges from 9 to 100 feet.

Mississippi River Facts Overhead #2

All beaches along the Mississippi River are public property.

The average flow of the river is 600,000 cubic feet per second.

The river and its tributaries supply drinking water for more than 18 million people in the central U.S.

The Mississippi River is divided into two sections, the Upper Mississippi and the Lower Mississippi. The dividing point for these two sections is where the Ohio River joins the Mississippi River.

There are 29 locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi River.

Mississippi River Chronology Overhead #3

Long before the arrival of Europeans, Native Americans known as “Mound Builders” built Cahokia on the banks of the Mississippi River across from the present site of St. Louis. The river was an important part of their trade networks.

Native Americans such as the Illinois and Ojibwa of the Upper Mississippi Valley and the Choctaw and Natchez of the Lower Mississippi Valley depended on the river for transportation, fishing and waterfowl.

During the 1500s and 1600s, Spanish and French explorers used the river as the means to explore the region.

In the late 1600s and early 1700s the Mississippi River became important to the expansion of the fur trade, centered at St. Louis.

Overhead #4

Following the American Revolution, the United States gained control of the eastern bank of the Mississippi with the exception of Spanish West Florida. In 1803 Louisiana Purchase gave the U.S. control of the Mississippi River and lands west to the continental divide. New Spain remained in control of territory in the southwest.

Settlers and traders set out on the river in flatboats, keelboats, and rafts.

The importance of the river for transportation and trade greatly increased in the early 1800s as paddle wheeled steamboats became popular. Cities along the Mississippi such as St. Louis boomed.

During the Civil War, both the North and the South used the river for transportation.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many river cities became industrialized, including New Orleans, Memphis, and St. Louis.

Overhead #5

In the 1930s flood control structures such as dams and levees were built. Locks and dams were built in the Upper Mississippi to improve navigation for river barges.

Barge traffic continued to increase as tugboats with long barge tows carried grain, petroleum products, cement and coal to cities and industries up and down the river.

In 1986 Congress designated the Upper Mississippi River as both a nationally significant ecosystem and a nationally significant navigation system.

In 1993 the most damaging flood in United States history occurred in the Mississippi watershed.

In the late 1990s the Mississippi River was designated as an American Heritage River.

Overhead #6

- Around 1800 the Mississippi River began to change course at St. Louis. It was moving closer to the Illinois side and further from St. Louis.
- Sandbars began to get bigger. The space between sandbars and the shore began to fill with silt.
- St. Louis was in danger of losing its waterfront and becoming landlocked.

???What effects would this have on the city???

- In 1833 people in St. Louis decided to act. They used teams of oxen to try and plow up the area. This failed. They decided to try something else.

???Why do you think the people of St. Louis didn't just give up and let the river change its course???

- They next decided to “move the river.”
- They placed a dam near an island that had once been a sandbar and was causing some of the trouble. Water covered the island and the river deepened.
- The waterfront of St. Louis was saved.

???How might St. Louis have been different today if the river had changed its course???